

Message Text

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TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK

SUBJECT: GENERAL ELECTION OUTLOOK: NEW ELECTION VARIABLES

SUMMARY: CONTINUATION OF TREND FAVORING LIBERAL AND NATIONALIST PARTIES OBSERVED IN FEBRUARY 1974 ELECTION WILL REDUCE LIKELIHOOD OF EITHER OF TWO MAJOR PARTIES GAINING PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY IN ANTICIPATED FALL GENERAL ELECTION. CONSERVATIVES' PROSPECTS FOR A MAJORITY ARE SERIOUSLY THREATENED BY THE LIBERALS, AND LABOR'S CHANCES ARE PREJUDICED BY SCOTTISH AND WELSH NATIONALIST GROUPS. THESE NEW CIRCUMSTANCES INCREASE FLUIDITY AND UNPREDICTABILITY OF BRITISH ELECTORAL POLITICS, AND MAY GIVE RISE TO NEW PATTERN OF VOTER BEHAVIOR WHICH COULD MAKE ELECTORAL RESULT EVEN MORE VOLATILE. END SUMMARY

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1. FEBRUARY 1974 ELECTION CHANGED UK ELECTORAL EQUATION IN DRAMATIC FASHION. WHERE PREVIOUSLY SWINGS IN VOTING PATTERNS COULD BE TRANSLATED ALMOST DIRECTLY INTO SEATS FOR THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES, THE SHARPLY IMPROVED PERFORMANCE OF LIBERAL AND NATIONALIST PARTIES (ULSTER PARTIES EXCEPTED) AND A CONCOMITANT HIGH NUMBER OF MARGINAL SEATS INTRODUCED NEW FACTORS INTO THE EQUATION, MAKING IT FAR MORE VOLATILE AND UNPREDICTABLE. IN FEBRUARY THE TORIES WON 38 PERCENT OF POPULAR VOTE, GAINING 297 SEATS IN PARLIAMENT AND FALLING 21 SEATS SHORT OF ABSOLUTE MAJORITY. LABOR, HOWEVER, WON 301 SEATS ON 37 PERCENT OF VOTES. ALTHOUGH 17 SEATS SHORT OF MAJORITY, LABOR WAS ABLE TO FORM A GOVERNMENT. THE LIBERAL, SCOTTISH NATIONALIST (SNP) AND PLAID CYMRU (WELSH) PARTIES WERE THE SPOILERS: THE LIBERALS WON 14 SEATS AND 19 PERCENT OF THE VOTE AND THE NATIONALISTS WON 9 SEATS AND 2.6 PERCENT OF THE VOTE (CONCENTRATED IN SCOTLAND AND WALES, OF COURSE). ULSTER PARTIES, WHICH ACCOUNT FOR 12 SEATS, ARE EXCLUDED FROM THIS ANALYSIS.

2. LABOR NEEDS AN ADDITIONAL 17 SEATS IN NEXT GENERAL ELECTION FOR A PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY, WHILE TORIES NEED 21. ASSUMING NO OTHER CHANGES FROM FEBRUARY ELECTION RESULTS, A UNIFORM SWING OF ONLY 1.2 PERCENT FROM THE CONSERVATIVE TO LABOR WOULD GIVE LABOR A CLEAR MAJORITY. CONSERVATIVES WOULD REQUIRE A UNIFORM 1.4 PERCENT SWING FROM LABOR UNDER THE SAME CIRCUMSTANCES. HOWEVER, VARIATIONS IN THE VOTES RECEIVED BY LIBERALS AND NATIONALIST PARTIES COULD HAVE PROFOUND EFFECT ON THE ELECTORAL OUTCOME IN TERMS OF PARLIAMENTARY SEATS. IN FEBRUARY, LIBERALS FINISHED SECOND IN 146 CONSTITUENCIES. OF THESE 128 ARE CONSERVATIVE-HELD. ONLY THREE OF THE LIBERALS MOST PROMISING 100 TARGET CONSTITUENCIES ARE PRESENTLY HELD BY LABOR. ACCORDINGLY, ANY INCREASE IN LIBERAL REPRESENTATION WILL BE ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY AT EXPENSE OF CONSERVATIVES. SNP GAINS IN FEBRUARY ELECTION WERE LARGELY AT TORY EXPENSE. FURTHER SNP GAINS, HOWEVER, ARE MORE LIKELY TO HURT LABOR, AS SIX OF SNP'S TEN BEST PROSPECTS ARE CURRENTLY HELD BY LABOR, WITH BALANCE HELD BY CONSERVATIVES. IN WALES THE PICTURE IS SIMILAR:

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WELSH PARTY HAS ITS BEST SHOT AT A LABOR-HELD SEAT.

3. IN MARGINAL CONSTITUENCIES. SUPPORTERS OF A MAJOR PARTY WHICH FINISHED IN THIRD PLACE MAY BE TEMPTED TO SUPPORT THE MINOR PARTY WHICH FINISHED SECOND IN ORDER TO PRECLUDE VICTORY BY THEIR PRINCIPAL RIVAL. THIS PRACTICE IS KNOWN AS "STRATEGIC VOTING", AND SOME OBSERVERS BELIEVE THE SNP'S FEBRUARY SUCCESS WAS DUE IN LARGE PART

TO STRATEGIC VOTING BY TRADITIONAL LABOR SUPPORTERS. IN NEXT ELECTION SHOE WILL BE ON OTHER FOOT IN SCOTLAND, BUT STRATEGIC VOTING BY LABOR SUPPORTERS IN ALL CONSTITUENCIES WHERE LIBERALS RAN A STRONG SECOND WOULD SERIOUSLY DAMAGE THE CONSERVATIVES' CHANCES FOR A MAJORITY.

4. SEPTEMBER 15 SUNDAY TIMES PUBLISHED ANALYSIS OF POSSIBLE ELECTION OUTCOME, USING FIVE DISCREET, SINGLE VARIABLE ASSUMPTIONS. THIS ANALYSIS, WHICH IS SUMMARIZED BELOW, CLEARLY ILLUSTRATES NEW FLUIDITY OF BRITISH ELECTORAL SCENE. WITH THE FEBRUARY ELECTION RESULTS AS THE BASE POINT TABLE SHOWN BELOW DEPICTS POSSIBLE ELECTION RESULTS, IN PARLIAMENTARY SEATS, UNDER FOLLOWING ASSUMED CONDITIONS:

- A) ONE PERCENT SHIFT FROM LABOR TO CONSERVATIVES, NO OTHER CHANGE.
- B) ONE PERCENT SHIFT FROM CONSERVATIVES TO LABOR, NO OTHER CHANGE.
- C) FOUR PERCENT SHIFT FROM CONSERVATIVES TO LIBERALS, NO OTHER CHANGE.
- D) FOUR PERCENT SHIFT FROM LABOR TO LIBERALS, NO OTHER CHANGE.
- E) FOUR PERCENT SHIFT FROM BOTH CONSERVATIVES AND LABOR TO LIBERALS, NO OTHER CHANGE.

	CONS	LAB	LIB	OTHERS
BASE POINT	297	301	14	23
A)	314	284	13	24
B)	281	317	14	23
C)	260	327	25	23
D)	329	269	14	23
E)	267	295	48	25

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5. THE ABOVE ANALYSIS INDICATES CONSERVATIVE MAJORITY ONLY UNDER ASSUMPTION D, AND LABOR MAJORITY ONLY UNDER ASSUMPTION C (LABOR IS ONE SEAT SHORT UNDER ASSUMPTION B). THIS SUGGESTS THAT MAJOR PARTIES WILL HAVE EXCEEDINGLY DIFFICULT TASK IN GAINING ABSOLUTE PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY IN NEXT ELECTION, BARRING A LARGE AND DRAMATIC SHIFT IN POPULAR SUPPORT. IN ADDITION, STRATEGIC VOTING IN MARGINAL CONSTITUENCIES COULD OFFSET ALL OR PART OF GAINS DERIVED FROM SUCH SHIFTS. THE CONSERVATIVES ARE ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE TO STRATEGIC VOTING, BUT LABOR IS NOT IMMUNE, PARTICULARLY IN SCOTLAND. IT IS EVIDENT THAT MINOR PARTIES' INCREASED ELECTORAL IMPORTANCE, TOGETHER WITH PROBABLE INTRODUCTION OF SOME STRATEGIC VOTING, SHARPLY INCREASES UNCERTAINTIES FACING MAJOR

PARTIES AND THOSE WHO SEEK TO FORECAST ELECTION OUTCOME.
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